

all of whom must be combatted with a special conjuring.

The author's quest, as a half-ghost herself, is both to be accepted by her large and diverse family, and to make sense of the social norms of the Chinese culture, and still to be able to assert her own worth and identity. To do this, Kingston superimposes the heritage of the past on her own historical present with her unique blend of history, myth, Americana, childhood memories, movies, scenes from pre-Revolutionary China (as her mother experienced it), and even a few glimpses of post-Revolutionary China (mainly from letters her parents get from indigent relatives).

The opening chapter, "No Name Woman," gives a history to an aunt of whom her family never speaks, the first of many ghosts demanding to be flesh. Wounded by a repressive culture, the victimized aunt gives way to the woman warrior herself, who rages across China to get even with anybody who hurts her family. In a later chapter, the woman warrior will return to the narrator in the form of a doll from China, but her mother, Brave Orchid, a real shaman, is Kingston's best subject. Brave Orchid haunts her children like a ghost, and like ghosts, they rarely visit, though she longs to know more of their lives, just as they long to understand hers. She "talks-story" so well that her daughter often has trouble sorting out her own reality from her mother's acts of the imagination.

Brave Orchid's sister, Moon Orchid, a new arrival "At the Western Palace," is another victim, abandoned by her husband, and brought to America by Brave Orchid. But Moon Orchid's strength cannot match the inequalities of her new culture: she is too old and backward for this hard new world.

The sections keep retelling the same "talk-story," trying to wind it ever-tighter, to compress it more fully inside a replica of itself, as in a series of Chinese boxes. The last section, "Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe," is still concerned with not being able to talk—another version of Moon Orchid's story, or the narrator's childhood, the little Chinese girl trying to make herself speak. Linear progression is sacrificed to the continued repetition of the old stories. Yet the lips of the half-ghost not only flesh the old traditions and memories, but give new utterance to them.

This memoir is a poetic, thoughtful, wonderfully subtle reclamation of self, an important book, setting a high standard for autobiography. More than personal history, it is a personal mythology.

Elizabeth Fifer

## HARRY STEINHAUER, Ed & Trans.

### *Twelve German Novellas*

Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977. Pp. 618.

Harry Steinhauer's anthology *Twelve German Novellas* is a revised and enlarged edition of his earlier book *Ten German Novellas* which was published in 1969. In his 15-page introduction Professor Steinhauer traces and analyzes the historical development of the European short fiction beginning with Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Cervantes's *Novelas Ejemplares*, and the contes of Voltaire and Diderot leading to the German novella of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. German writer-critics such as Friedrich Schlegel, Ludwig Tieck, Goethe, and Paul Heyse are mentioned and their theories about the novella are then briefly discussed.

After summing up the twelve most common demands made by literary theorists on the novella (p. xix-xx), Steinhauer concludes that "there is no inherent, magical character in literary materials that predestines them to become a novel, a novella or an anecdote" (p. xxi). Therefore a common denominator must be found elsewhere, and Harry Steinhauer suggests that German scholars "adopt Anglo-American usage, which classifies prose fiction with a yardstick . . . for classification by size is widely used in both nature . . . and in culture" (p. xxiii). This is reminiscent of an earlier statement made by Professor Steinhauer in his article "Towards a Definition of the Novella": "What, then, is a novella? I would say: it is a narrative of medium length (i.e. between the novel and the

short story), involving people, nature . . . society and even the sphere of the supernatural or of pure imagination . . . told for the purpose of instruction and/or entertainment, and using structure and imaginative language, or any other literary device that enhances the aesthetic experience" (*Seminar*, 4, No. 2 [1970], 173).

The twelve novellas that Harry Stein-hauer has chosen for this anthology are Wieland's "Love and Friendship Tested" (1805), Kleist's "Michael Kohlhaas" (1810), E. T. A. Hoffman's "Mademoiselle de Scudéry" (1820), Chamisso's "The Strange Story of Peter Schlemihl" (1813), Keller's "Clothes Make the Man" (1874), C. F. Meyer's "The Sufferings of a Boy" (1883), Fontane's "Stine" (1888), Thomas Mann's "The Buffoon" (1897), Hauptmann's "The Heretic of Soana" (1918), Schnitzler's "Fräulein Else" (1924), Kafka's "A Hunger Artist" (1922), Bergengruen's "Ordeal by Fire" (1933).

Employing the "yardstick" approach suggested by H. Steinhauer it is easy to notice that Kleist's "Michael Kohlhaas" with 79 pages is the longest and Kafka's "A Hunger Artist" with 9 pages is the shortest novella of this collection. The average length is 46 pages. This shows that this "yardstick" method must be flexible enough to allow exceptions: "We need labels like novel, romance, short novel, novella, short story; but we must never grant them the status of realia" (p. xxiii). Looking at the subject matter of the novellas one finds a great variety of themes and motifs such as wife swapping, adultery, crime, justice, etc. The notes preceding each story supply the reader with valuable information concerning the novella itself and the importance of its author. There is no doubt that students of comparative literature as well as the general reader will find Professor Steinhauer's book a very challenging and rewarding collection of Novellas.

S. Sturm-Dickson

VERA T. RECK

*Boris Pil'niak: A Soviet Writer in Conflict with the State*

Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1975. Pp. 243. \$6.00.

During the fabulous 1920's in Soviet literature, Boris Pilnyak (Pil'niak) was one of those exciting writers who contributed significantly to making the period what it was—the best, the freest (relatively speaking), and qualitatively the most lasting in all Soviet literature. That he had to pay with his life for his iconoclastic behavior is both tragic and symptomatic of the society in which he had to live. The circumstances of his death were such that we still do not know time, place, and manner in which he died during the purges. For that reason, not much has been, or can be, written about his ultimate fate. The fact that he was out of limelight for decades also tended to obscure even what little we know about him. Slowly and inexorably, however, more and more is coming to light about the fate of writers like Pilnyak. In her extensive book, *Boris Pil'niak: A Soviet Writer in Conflict with the State*, Vera T. Reck attempts to shed light on the circumstances surrounding Pilnyak's gallant, at times Quixotic and naive, but still heroic and deeply tragic struggle against the state which attempts to crush all those who disagree with it.

The author follows Pilnyak's attempts in his stories and novels to depict reality as it is and not as it ought to be; his utilization of motifs that were tantalizing to a writer while at the same time dangerously bordering on political taboos; many "scandals" occurring frequently on the literary scene in 1920's; and the "crimes"—Pilnyak's as well as those of others—which eventually brought about suffering and death. The author repeats some well-known details, but she also reveals some hitherto unknown material, which contributes to our understanding, not only of Pilnyak, but of the entire period in Soviet literature as well. It is unfortunate, though understandable, that she felt compelled to conceal some sources of the new information. For the time being these new facts have to be accepted with the hope that some day they can be verified and complemented. Were it not for the extraordinary conditions under which scholar-